

28 sermon

A
S E R M O N
Preached before the
LORD MAYOR,
AND
Magistracy
OF
D U B L I N,

In St. *Andrew's Church*, DUBLIN;

OCTOBER the 18th. 1707.

By EDWARD, ^{Smith} Lord Bishop of *Down and Connor*.

Printed at their Request.

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Printed by *Joseph Ray*, and are to be Sold at his Shop in
Skinner Row, over against the *Tholsel*, 1708.

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Philippians, I. xxvii.

Only let your Conversation be, as it becometh the Gospel of Christ.

THE Apostle here Exhorts the *Philippians*, and in them all Christians to consider their Call and Profession, that they are Members of Christs Mystical Body the Church; that they are Citizens of the Heavenly and New *Jerusalem*, that they are seperated from the general mass of Mankind, and adoped into a peculiar People, a chosen Inheritance, and that therefore they should walk worthy of these privileges and distinctions, that they should let the World see and read it in their Lives, that they are Christians, that they should hold forth the excellency of their Faith by a pious and exemplary Life.

Our *Conversation* here signifies our outward Conduct and appearance in the World, that part of our Lives which falls under the Observation of others, the whole course of our Words and Actions; in all this therefore Religion must shine and appear, we must so walk and converse among Men, *as becomes the Gospel of Christ.*

Be as the World is In

In the following Discourse, I will

~~First~~ Inforce the Exhortation and Duty contained in my Text.

And it being notorious, that the *Conversation* of the Age we live in, is far from being such as *becomes the Gospel of Christ*.

I will, *Secondly*, Consider which may be the best means to Cure and Reform that *Licentiousness, Immorality and Profaneness*, which now prevail in the World.

First, Then, That all *Christians* are obliged to a Pious and Religious *Conversation*, is a matter of so great Evidence, that if all the *Doctrines* of our Holy Religion, were not corrupted by sensual Men on the one hand, and by *Enthusiasts* on the other, it would need no Proof or Illustration; but some have separated the Christian Faith from practice, and have denied the Influence of it on the Lives of Men, and therefore it's necessary, that these Important Truths should be cleared and established.

And this now under Consideration will I think appear.

First, Because our blessed Saviour has required this evidence of our Faith, and has declared, that the fairest Pretensions to Sanctity and Religion will be Vain and Empty without it.

The Sermon on the Mount is chiefly about Moral Vertues, and such Improvements, as the Gospel has given of them. We are saved by Faith in Christ, but we must not possess this Faith in unrighteousness, but let it shine forth in a fair and exemplary Life, otherwise GOD will not Receive it.

When we shall all appear at the final Judgment, we shall then be Examined about the Works of Piety and Charity, whether we have fed the Hungry, and Cloathed the Naked; and whether Religion has appeared in our Words & Actions.

St. James tells us, That if any man pretends to be religious and does not bridle his tongue, that man's religion is vain, that pure and undefiled religion before GOD, and the father is visiting the fatherless, and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

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The Apostle *St. Paul* had particular occasions to Clear, and Explain this Doctrine; the first Christians had been Exercised with severe Sufferings and many Persecutions: The Powers of this World were set against our Religion, and many cruel methods were employed to suppress it.

Now such is the deceitfulness of Mens Hearts, that many devices were found out to avoid falling into Persecution. All Christians had not Constancy and Courage enough to suffer for their Religion, and this put them upon finding out ways to shun it. Their Consciences were so well convinced of the certainty of the Christian Religion, that they could not in their Hearts renounce the truth of it. Why then the Belief of Christianity and Sacrificing to Idols must be some way or other Reconciled. And pursuant to this, the distinction was found out of reserving their Hearts for GOD and Christ; but of complying with Heathenish Idolatry in their Words and Actions, and by this means to avoid the rage of Persecution: This was a main part of the Heresie of the *Gnosticks*, and was calculated to pass safe and easily thro' such fiery Trials.

But our great Apostle to the Gentiles declares such Practices to be abominable, for that we are obliged to profess Christ with our Mouths, in our Words and Actions, and that we must never decline acknowledging our Master, when we are called to it. The Exhortation in my Text is particularly levell'd against them, and *St. Paul* had laboured extremely to beat down this dangerous and growing Heresie. Our whole Life is due to GOD, Christ has the same Claim to our Words and Actions, that he hath to our Souls, and he must be acknowledged in all of them.

'Tis true, Religion is an Act of the Mind, Faith is a Habit of the Soul, by which we submit to, and receive Christ, but if these are sincere, they must influence our Words and Actions, they must direct and govern our outward Conversation. Christianity does consider us as distributed into the several Callings and Professions of Life, and requires us to show
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the Influence of Religion in all Stations and Circumstances. Whether we are Bond or Free, Jews or Greeks, when we come into the Christian Church, we must conscientiously discharge our proper Duties, and walk worthy of our Vocation.

But *Secondly*, We are obliged to a Christian Conversation, because the Interest and Advancement of our Religion are much concerned in it.

Our Lives are a sensible Argument for the Truth & Goodness of our Religion; every Man can see this, and will be apt to take his Opinion of our Faith by it: An Holy Life is recommended for this very Reason, *That Men seeing our good works, may glorifie our father which is in heaven.* It does require some degree of Learning, much Consideration, and a serious Enquiry fully to understand the Nature of our Religion, the Concurrence of Prophecies, and the other Evidences for the Truth of it. But an Holy Life, a Religious Conversation, a steady Regard to Justice and Honesty in all our Dealings, such a Government of our Discourse as Meekness and Charity do direct, governed Passions, and mortified Appetites; returning Good for Evil, being all things to all Men: Such a Conversation will give an Impression to all observers, that our Religion is Divine, they will readily conclude, That the fountain must be good, where the Waters are so sweet. That the Tree must be Excellent, which sends forth such Fruit.

This under the miraculous and over-ruling Providence of God, was one of the Reasons, why Christianity spread and prevailed so fast in the World; the Enemies of our Faith were softened, and often Converted, by observing Christians to be the most upright Dealers, the most faithful Friends, the most useful Subjects, and such as out-did All others in good Offices and Acts of Kindness.

Happy were those Days, and may it yet please G O D, to restore this Church to the same flourishing condition; when
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Men could appeal to their Lives to shew the excellency of their Religion, when they could remove all the Aspersions of Envy and Malice by a fair, unblemished Reputation, when they could boldly challenge their Enemies to observe their Behaviour and their Actions, and could pass with Honour through all these Trials.

It was one of the Arts of Persecution, to represent our Holy Religion, as monstrous and ridiculous; but to all this, the Answer was soft and convincing, and the Apologists for the Christians, thus addressed their Adversaries, "If you will not take the trouble to examin our Faith, do but look into our Conversation among you, observe what lies before you, our Discourse & Actions. Do we not endeavour to practice Virtue and Holiness, to avoid all Sin and Wickedness, these cannot be the Directions of a ridiculous Institution, but of a Holy and Reasonable Religion.

This being observed by the Heathens, often broke the fury of a mistaken Zeal; it made them inquisitive after the Christian Religion, and this, with GOD's preventing Grace, opened the way to many Converts.

The Power and Influence of Example is very great in the common judgment of Mankind, it prevents insensibly and makes deep impressions; when it is therefore good, it must very much advantage and recommend Religion; the good Man edifies daily by his Conversation and do's service to Religion. And if we do but consider the particular excellency of the Christian Spirit, an Example thus accomplished, could not fail of gaining much upon the World. Meekness and Chastity, Humility and Charity, have Beauties that will gain Admirers, and do recommend a Man beyond all the improvements of this World.

And let no Man imagin himself to be so little in the world, but that his Conversation will affect Religion. We have all Children, Neighbours, Friends, Servants, or Relations, who may be thus Edified, or Corrupted. And as we

are all concerned to promote the Glory of GOD, and to recommend our Holy Religion to others; so we must always endeavour to observe such a conduct in the World, *as becomes the Gospel of Christ.*

But it being Notorious, that the *Conversation* of the Age we live in, is far from being such: I proceed to Consider,

Secondly, Which may be the best means to Cure and Re-form that *Licentiousness, Immorality, and Prophaneness*, which now prevail in the World.

'Tis undoubtedly the peculiar Duty of the Ministers of the Gospel, to labour earnestly in this most necessary Work of Reformation: They are the Pastors of the Flock, to feed them with sound Doctrine, and to edifie them by an Holy and Exemplary *Conversation*. They are to Exhort and Reprove, to be instant in doing it, in season and out of season; and to shape themselves to the Spiritual wants of their People? And as their Work is grown upon their hands by the great Corruption of Mens Manners, so I beseech GOD to give them Hearts to double their Care and Diligence in discharging the several Duties of their Holy Profession.

There was a Time when the Bishops and Pastors of the Church, as being the Church Representative, had Authority and Credit sufficient to beat down the Impudence of open Wickedness, and to give Religion such marks of distinction as gained esteem for it among Men; the Censures of the Church, and the dreadful Sentence of Excommunication had their just weight among Christians, and no Man could live easily under them; Men would quit their darling and profitable Vices, rather than be denied the benefit of the Holy Sacrament, and would avoid giving publick Scandal, rather than provoke the Church to throw them out of her Communion.

But these Powers, tho' Christ be their Author, being Spiritual, and only Binding the Souls of Men, have thro' Infidelity, and other wicked Principles, lost much of their force: And whereas it was once reckoned a heavy Punish-

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ment to be excluded from the Lord's Supper, how many are there, who now live in an open and scandalous neglect of this Holy Ordinance, thro' the whole course of their Lives.

The Authority of the Church being thus weakened, we owe it to the merciful providence of GOD, that He has influenced the Hearts of our Princes and Parliaments, to make Laws against Publick Wickedness, and to punish Men in their Bodies, and Temporal Interests for being *Immoral* and *Prophane*.

I take it therefore to be an excellent way to Reform, that *Licentiousness* and open *Impiety*, which prevail in this our Age, to give a discreet and steddy Execution to such Laws.

And in order to give us the benefit of these Laws, which have been made by the Wisdom and Piety of our Country, Two Things are Necessary.

First, A Spirit of Religion, a Zeal for the Honour and Glory of GOD in our Magistrates.

Secondly, A just Esteem for All such, as shall be active and industrious in giving Information against, and in Prosecuting scandalous Sinners.

First, Then, A Zeal for the Honour and Glory of GOD in our Magistrates is necessary.

Power was not given to the Magistrate, to gratifie the Ambition and Vanity of Human Nature, or only to distinguish Him from other Men by the outward Attendance and Circumstances of Greatness, but to promote Piety, and punish open Wickedness.

St. Paul represents this to be the Reason, why Magistracy was appointed to be a Terror to the Evil; that the Magistrate bears not the Sword in vain, that He is the Minister of GOD, an Avenger to execute wrath upon Him that doth Evil. And further, that this ought to be His continual Employment; *for they are Gods ministers attending continually upon this very thing, Rom. 13.*

I take it to have been the common Perſuaſion and Senſe of Mankind, That it is the Principal Duty of the Supreme Magiſtrate, and conſequently of All, who are Subordinate to Him, to protect and promote Religion. Even the Roman Emperors, when Heatheniſm prevailed, preſerved that of *Pontifex Maximus* among their Titles: And when it pleaſed GOD to deliver His Church from Perſecution, by the Con- verſion of *Conſtantine the Great*. This Glorious Emperour made it his chief buſineſs to promote the Chriſtian Religion; He called the Firſt General Council, to put a ſtop to ſome dangerous Heresies. The Empreſs *Helena* Erected many Magnificent Churches, and our Holy Religion had all the Countenance and Encouragement, which that Powerful Court could give it.

The Holy *David* employed that Kingly Authority, which GOD gave him, to promote the Honour and Glory of GOD; his Zeal for Religion was ſo remarkable, that he is diſtinguiſhed by that extraordinary Character of being the *Man after Gods own heart*. It was *Solomon's* choice, That GOD would give him Wiſdom, which is explained by himſelf to be *the Fear of God, and keeping his Commandments*. And he was ſo active in promoting Piety, that we find him afterwards a Preacher of it, and his Sermons will be edifying to the end of the World.

How precious are the Names of thoſe Religious Kings of *Judah*, ſuch are *Aſah*, *Jehoſaphat*, and *Hezekiah*, who delivered their Country from Idolatry, and reſtored the pureſt Worſhip of GOD; on the other hand, how odious is their Character, who drew their People into the abominable and wicked Practices of the *Gentiles*.

It was the Glory of the *Maccabees*, That they purged the Temple, and removed the Abomination of Deſolation, which was there ſet up by *Antiochus*. And even thoſe Idols, which prophaned the Temple of *Jeruſalem*, cannot be a greater Nu- ſance, and Abomination, than open *Impiety* and *Prophaneneſs*.

The Scripture has determined it, and the common Sense of Mankind has confessed it, That the Power given by GOD to the Magistrate, is chiefly to be Employed in promoting Religion, and bearing down Wickedness.

And certainly the Cause of God and Religion, do in this our Age, call aloud upon the Magistrate, to be Active and Diligent in discharging this part of his Duty.

The Vices of the Age were grown to an excessive height, and near to their full measure. They had confirmed themselves by Fashion and Reputation; Oaths and Execrations have been reckoned Graces & Ornaments of mens discourse; Lewdeness and Licentiousness have passed for Accomplishments; Over-reaching a Mans Neighbour has been reckoned the just advantage of a Mans better Parts and Understanding, and many to whom GOD had given excellent Abilities have employed them intirely against him, and laboured nothing more than to give fair Colours and Disguises to Wickedness: Nay, some Men seemed to have taken Hell by force, and have affected Vices which they were not able to commit.

It was said of Christians, in a very corrupt Age; That they differ'd only from Heathens, in that they had a better Religion, and worse Vices; and it will be, I fear, the Reproach of our Times, that tho' by the favourable Providence of GOD, we are Delivered from the Idolatry & Superstition of the Church of *Rome*; that tho' we enjoy the Christian Religion in it's Primitive Purity, yet no Reformation appears in our lives; but on the contrary, That Wickedness has been impudent and barefaced, and Men have run out into all the excesses of *Licentiousness* and *Debauchery*. And from hence proceed the many bold attempts which have been made in this Age, against the Christian Faith, and Gospel Ministry: We have seen *Scepticks* Disputing against the Truth of our Holy Religion; *Socinians* Denying the most Essential Arti-

cles of our Faith; and *Deists* who will not acknowledge that the Gospel contains the Revealed Will of G O D.

The Authors of these Extravagancies have appeared openly, they have endeavoured to justify their Opinions in Print, and Arguments have been alledged to support these Execrable Follies,

The Ministers of G O D's Word, they who are to stand between G O D and the People, they to whom is committed the Ministry of Reconciliation, have been traduced with the Odious Name of Priest-craft; and as taking too much upon them. 'Tis a light matter to Us to suffer much more in the cause of Christ; but it grieves Us to see Religion Wounded thro' our sides, for I hope, I may be allowed to make an Old Observation on this Occasion, *Qui Deum colit amat & sacerdotes* ? 'Tis an evidence of loving G O D that we love his Ministers.

I take the true reason of all this to be, that looseness of Manners I have now represented. For wicked men cannot be easie under the Belief of our Holy Religion, and therefore they take refuge in Infidelity; they endeavour to satisfy their Consciences, by persuading themselves, that it is only a well contrived Imposture.

That this is their Case, I dare appeal to themselves in their sober Hours, and in those melancholy seasons when Death stares them in the face, they are then full of fears, that there will be an After-reckoning, and then tremble to consider, how ill they are provided to appear before G O D in Judgment.

As for all the pains that have been taken to support Infidelity by Arguments, tho' Men of Parts and Wit have engaged in this wicked Service, they are so mean and pitiful, that it may very well be doubted, whether the Authors of them can believe they have any force; sure I am, they do not deserve the pains, that many Learned Men have taken to expose and confute them. Our great Apostle prays to be delivered, in the

the course of his Ministry, from unreasonable, (in the Margin of our Bibles,) absurd, and wicked Men, *1 Thes. 3. 2.* And as we Preach the same Gospel, we may be sure, the Enemies of it are alike absurd and wicked Men. The best Answer therefore to such impious and extravagant follies, is to check open *Impiety*, to punish *Licentiousness* and *Prophaneness*, Let me therefore intreat the Christian Magistrate to apply himself with Zeal to this great Work ; let him consider the plain Effects and Consequences of *Immorality*, as they are now Represented to Him : That our Holy Religion has been insulted by it, and that the Holy Jesus, the Author & Finisher of our Faith, GOD Blessed for ever, has not only been treated as a meer Man, but if I may repeat, after these prophane Wretches, such an execrable Word, as an *Impostor*.

Do's not Religion call aloud for his Protection and Assistance, 'tis his Duty, and the end for which Magistracy was put into his hand, as I have already observed ; and being such, I must lay it upon his Conscience, to encourage Religion and execute the Laws against *Impiety*.

Power is a Talent committed by GOD to the Magistrate, and he must give account at the final Judgment, how he has managed and improved it. It will be demanded of the Magistrate on that great Day, Have you exercised the Authority I gave you, in the encouragement of Virtue, and the punishment of Vice ? I have raised you above the rest of your Brethren, that Religion might have the advantage of your Countenance and Protection : Have you thus behaved your self in the higher Station of a Magistrate ? 'Tis upon these Terms, and no other, that You may expect to enter into the joy of your Lord.

And to qualifie the Magistrate for the discharge of this Duty, His own *Conversation* must be such as becomes the Gospel of Christ. He must show forth the excellency of that Religion he professes, and would encourage, by a bright and fair Example ; for it is with the Magistrate as with the Minister.

nister of the Gospel, the Preaching of the one, and the Authority of the other can have little effect, unless they walk worthy of their Vocation, and recommend Piety by their Practise.

We have seen already that promoting Piety is the Magistrates indispensable Duty, and that the growing Vices of the Age render it necessary, that he should execute this Duty with Zeal and Constancy, let me recommend the same Duty to Him.

Secondly, Because no other part of his Duty can be performed with success without it.

In the administration of Justice, he has frequent occasion to Administer an Oath, by this, Differences are ended, and Disputes are determined, Men's Lives and Properties depend upon it; but Justice will fail in these cases, unless men live under a sense of the fear of GOD, of his omnipresence, and infinite Justice; the human Laws against Perjury will reach but few Offenders, and multitudes of Perjur'd Wretches will escape unpunished.

Where Irreligion and Immorality prevail, that People are not only ripe for GOD's Judgments, but all Human Laws are defeated, the State will be overturned by Treasons, and Men's Properties will be every day invaded by the subtil Arts of Fraud and Perjury, this will change the best Constitution in the World into the vilest Tyranny and Oppression.

We all desire to see that excellent Constitution of Government, under which the favourable providence of GOD has placed us, preserved and conveyed down to our posterity; it requires the care of every Magistrate, to secure such parts of it, as are committed to him; now this can never stand upon a firm and unshaken foundation, unless it be supported by Honesty and Religion. Men of unbridled Passions and Appetites will be but Wolves and Bears in human shape, and a Desert would be as good a situation as a Country Inhabited by such Monsters.

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Do Magistrates, to whom is committed the care of their Country, desire to see it prosper, by promoting *Piety* and a *Reformation of Manners*, we may expect this Blessing. This will engage Almighty GOD to take us into His particular Care and Protection; by this means He will become our GOD, and we shall be His People: That wonderful Presence which conducted the People of *Israel* thro' a Desert, and gave them Victory over their Enemies, will then watch over us, and make ours a Flourishing and Happy Country. Add here, that the several Virtues of a Christian Life naturally tend to make a People Rich and Prosperous.

It may be perhaps some Discouragement to our Magistracy, to set about this great and necessary work of *Reformation*; because the Torrent of Wickedness, as I have now represented it, may seem too strong for their Authority, and that they can have but little hopes of doing Good in such a crooked and perverse Generation.

But I may observe it, to the just commendation of many, who this day hear me, That by the zealous Opposition, which several pious Magistrates, and others, have given to open *Impiety*, and *Prophaneness*, a considerable check has been already given to many Vices, which reigned among us: *Impudent Lewdness*, *Prophane Cursing and Swearing*, the Neglect of the Lords Day, and other crying Sins have received the wages of Shame and Punishment, which our Laws had justly inflicted on them; and praised be GOD, they do not appear with the same Frequency and Assurance among us, as they did some Years ago. And I may further observe, that Two considerable Advantages have accrued to Religion from such Prosecutions. *First*, That it has hindered the evil Example of Sin from spreading, and giving Encouragement to others to commit the like Wickedness. And *Secondly*, That the Sinner being thus checked in his course of Wickedness, and meeting with this Disappointment, it has obliged him to some serious Thoughts of his Condition, and this may have given the beginning to a saving Repentance.

If therefore a beginning has been already given (and this I take to be the most difficult step) to this most desirable work of *Reformation*, by the Application and Zeal of some particular Persons, we may reasonably expect to see a considerable Progress made in it, by the vigorous Concurrence of all our Magistrates. There is a baseness and cowardice in Sin, which will be beaten down by such steady Opposition. It was by Impunity, and some other circumstances I am not willing to mention, that Sin had grown up to such excess among us; and a due Execution of our Laws against Wickedness will much contribute to the curing of this Evil: be assured it is the cause of GOD you labour in, and maugre the many difficulties which lie in your way, He will give you success in it.

We have now, praised be GOD, a very happy Conjunction, for carrying on this great and glorious Work.

GOD has placed a Queen over us, whose eminent Piety, and great Virtues have rendred Her the Glory and Ornament of the Age we live in; She has served GOD from Her youth faithfully, and GOD has distinguish'd Her Reign with very extraordinary Blessings, the World stands amazed to see the Triumphs of Her Fleets and Armies, but it is the peculiar Glory of Her Reign, that all these Advantages are employed to promote the Honour and Service of GOD: 'Tis the main end of that just War, in which She is engaged, to deliver Mankind from Slavery, and to rescue our Protestant Brethren from Persecution and Inquisitions. She is a most shining Example of Piety, She recommends it to Her People by Her Authority and Practice. She has given great evidences of Her Concern for Religion at home, and in our Plantations, nor has Her Care been bounded by the vast Extent of Her own Dominions, no, the Relief which a Generous Prince has lately obtained for our Protestant Brethren in *Silesia*, we may presume has proceeded from Her Influence, and we may hope to see our Protestant Brethren in *France*, and other Countries,

Countries, again Established under Her Protection. In a word, GOD has raised Her up for the great Work of *Reformation*, and may not our Sins deprive us of Her, till it be accomplished.

And as the Authority given to our Magistrates, is derived from Her Sacred Majesty, being the Fountain of Honour and Power, so I hope it will descend to them with a true Zeal for Piety and Religion. That Excellent Person, who now Presides over this Kingdom, is a just Representative of Her Majesty, and has faithfully copied all the Virtues of that Great Original.

And now let us suppose our Civil Magistrates to be Active and Careful in carrying on a *Reformation of Manners*. To give the Laws against *Immorality* and *Prophaneness* their due Effect, there must be,

Secondly, Persons animated with Zeal, and a just concern for Religion, to give the Magistrate Information against *Debauched* and *Immoral Persons*, in order to bring them to Punishment. These are necessary Instruments to carry on this great Work; by their Constancy and Piety it will proceed, so that in GOD's good time it will appear by our Lives, that we are a Christian People; by their diligence the secret combinations of Wickedness will be laid open; by their Resolution the biggest Sinners will be brought down, and both will be called before the Magistrate. The Work being great will require many to assist in it, and as some have already associated themselves in this Service, and have by this means given some stop to the overflowing of *Sin* and *Prophaneness*, so I hope their Numbers will encrease daily, and that they will be supported by all such, as have a Zeal and Concern for Religion.

It seems to me, incumbent on all good Christians to do this; the Great should protect them, the Rich should minister to the expence of Prosecutions, and every one should preserve a due esteem for them. But here a mighty Object-

on is thrown in the way, which I fear has hindred many well-meaning persons from putting their hands to this most desirable Work, and has already brought some reproach upon such as have appeared active against publick Sinners, and that is, the imputation of being Informers.

To remove the discouragement, that Men of Zeal & Piety may receive from this Imputation, I desire it may be Considered,

First, That by the Relation we bear to one another as Christians, being Members of Christs mystical Body, and obliged to have the same love and tenderness for each other, as there is between the Members of the Natural Body; being obliged to watch over the Soul of our Brother, and to help him forward in his way to Heaven; being commanded not to suffer Sin upon our Brother, but by all means to recover him from the snare of the Devil. It follows, I think, from these Relations and Engagements, That when the Sinner is deaf to the gentler methods of Admonition and Reproof, when we cannot otherwise stop his going on in the *Broad Way*, which leads to eternal Destruction, that we ought to accuse him before the Christian Magistrate, and by this means restrain his unbridled Appetites; for he may value his Money, his Liberty, or the being exposed to publick Shame and Punishment, who does not consider the much stronger Arguments for leading a Religious Life.

And by doing this, we may be the blessed Instruments of saving his Soul; thus we may possibly bring him to Repentance, as *St. Paul's* censure did the Incestuous *Corinthian*. We shall by this means hinder at least the infection of an evil Example, and take away the sinners vain confidence and security of going unpunished.

From which we may observe, That what the World would raduce with the odious Name of being an Informer, is a Christian Practice, and incumbent on Us, in vertue of our Christian Relation.

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But *Secondly*, Let it be further considered, That the World would dissolve, I mean, the best constituted Governments would fall into the utmost Confusion and Disorder, unless Men will inform against Offenders; The State would quickly be over-set with Treasons, unless Witnesses would Inform against such Criminals, and bring them to Justice; Our Streets would soon be filled with Murders, Rapin, and Injustice, unless the Sword of the Magistrate were applied to punish such Enormities; and this cannot be done, unless there be Informers to Accuse and Convict them. And by this it appears that the practice of Informing is necessary.

Thirdly, Therefore, seeing it is both Christian and Necessary to be an Informer in proper Cases, and to accuse Wicked Men before the Magistrate, however a corrupted World may Censure or Traduce you for it, it will be your comfort, that our Christian Relation requires us to do it, and that for the preservation of Mankind it is necessary.

Wicked Men are biased against Religion, and make an unfair judgment in such Cases; thus we see it commended for an act of Honour and Bravery to fight a Duel, and yet it is plainly against the Laws of the Gospel, a direct violation of that precept of our Lord, which commands Us to forgive, not to resent an Injury. In the Language of Sinners, he is reckoned an Honest Man, who runs into the greatest excesses of Debauchery; whereas he deserves the vilest Name that can be given him, being a heinous Sinner in the sight of GOD.

Fourthly, Therefore, let it be considered, That as you are censured by Wicked Men, only for being Informers in the Case before Us; so on the other hand, you will have the praise of GOD, your own Consciences, and all sober considering Men will highly commend you for it. 'Tis every Man's Duty, no doubt, to preserve a good Reputation; a good Name is very desirable; but then it is to the Good and Wise, to the Virtuous and Religious. We are to approve

our selves, 'tis their good esteem we are to desire and value ; We must not court any Mans Commendation at the expence of a good Conscience, or give up our Innocency, to gain his Character of Honour and Honesty. The World may be so desperately wicked, (I wish it be not our case,) that a man shall be loaded with Censures and Reproaches, because he endeavours strictly to observe the Laws of GOD, and to lead a Christian Life. I think it is very natural it should be so, for a bright example of Virtue stands before the profligate Sinner, as a continual Reproof; and whenever he gives his Conscience an opportunity of conversing with him, it will lash and reproach him with Arguments drawn from such a beautiful Object; and as the Virtuous Man is such an eye-sore to him, he will endeavour to blacken him with Calumnies and false Aspersions. From hence it proceeds, that the Libertines of this Age will allow Virtue to be nothing more, than Vice well covered, and disguised under fairer colours. It must not therefore surprize those, who assist in the work of *Reformation*, if they meet with ill usage from such men.

But *Fifthly*, Let it be further considered, that it is the Artifice of the Devil; and the Contrivance of wicked Men, thus to censure and asperse you; the Devil is very industrious to secure his captive Sinners, wicked Men are in a continual Plot against their own true Interest, and had much rather lie under the lethargy of Sin, than to be awakened to see the Evil of their ways, and to be brought to Repentance; and for this reason they will be angry with you, when you would separate them from their darling Lusts, and rear these Vipers from their bosom.

But *Sixthly*, If it shall please GOD to make this an occasion of their Repentance, and bring them to a better mind, they will then thank, love, and admire you, and esteem you, what you truly are, their best Friend. They will then hate their Companions in Iniquity, and such as flattered them in their Sins, and will always esteem you for their Benefactors.

Being

Being punished for a Mans Sins in this Life, is like taking Physick, and being under Afflictions, tho' they are bitter and ungrateful, when Men pass thro' them; yet when the good effects of *Reformation* follow, when Religion, which is the Health of the Soul is Recovered by it, - we then look upon the hand who administred the bitter Potion with joy and satisfaction.

Wicked Men are represented in Scripture in the truest colours, as not having the use of their Eyes, or Ears, as void of Understanding, nay, as Dead and Buried; no wonder then, if when they are under these Incapacities, they make a wrong Judgment of you, and every thing else, but when it shall please GOD to make you instruments of recovering their Senses, and of restoring their Understanding, of raising them from the Grave and Death of Sin, you may then be assured, they will love and esteem you.

I may now safely infer from what has been said, That the Imputation of being Informers, which will be given to you only by wicked Men, should be no Discouragement to you, in going on with this blessed and necessary work of *Reforming Men's Manners*. Sure I am, that in this you follow the Apostles Direction in my Text, this part of *your Conversation is such, as becomes the Gospel of Christ*.

And that you may proceed in it with the better Success, I earnestly recommend to you the following Directions.

First, That you put on the Armour of Constancy and Resolution, to meet all the Difficulties, or Discouragements, which may lie in your way. 'Tis certainly the Work of GOD you labour in, 'tis the Cause of the Lord you are advancing. For however these Expressions have been misapplied, to cover the designs of Faction and Rebellion; 'tis the common Sense of Mankind, all the Divisions of Christians agree in it, that to beat down *Immorality* and *Prophaneness*, to punish the Impudence of *publick Wickedness*, are highly acceptable to GOD, that who labour in it, do Him Service, and shall receive a Reward for it.

I know you will meet with many Difficulties, in executing the Laws against open *Impiety*; the publick Opposition of some, and the secret Underminings of others; the Frowns of some, and the Censure of many; but these are of the *Offences*, which our Blessed Lord tells us *must needs come*; and considering how Wickedness abounds in the World, and how unwilling wicked Men are to part with their Vices, it cannot be otherwise in the common course of things: Take therefore good heart and courage, my Brethren, from the powerful Grace of God, and from the following Meditations.

Am not I upon the Work of GOD, and is not He able to support me in it? Am not I doing good to the Souls of Men, and promoting their eternal Interest, tho' they have not Eyes to see this, nor Hearts to understand it? Did not my Blessed Saviour pass thro' the Contradiction of Sinners, and suffer infinite Indignities for my sake? and has he not commanded me to follow His Example, in loving my Brother? Did not the Holy Apostles resist unto Blood, and suffer Martyrdom with joy, that they might be the Instruments of Reforming a Wicked World? Why shall I then be Discouraged by the softer Names of an Informer, a Busy Body, or a Pretender to Piety. 'Tis not a Disputed point, that I am engaged in, 'tis not a matter indifferent, or of little moment: No surely, 'tis of those good things, about which the Apostle has directed us to be always zealously affected. If I am under a just sense of the fear of GOD, of His Power and Authority over the Sons of Men, I cannot bear to see His Holy Name Profaned, to see His Holy Laws trampled on, and openly Broken. I will therefore use my endeavours to Vindicate the Honour of GOD, and not suffer Wickedness to Triumph in the World. I will endeavour to bear it down by those Temporal Punishments which are most likely to affect the Sinner. I will by no means suffer sin upon him, or be a partner in his Guilt.

Secondly,

Secondly, I would direct such as labour in the Work of Reformation, to have their *Conversation* such as becomes the *Gospel of Christ*, to preserve an Unblemish'd Reputation for Piety.

There is a baseness in Impiety, which will be ready to rise up against you in unjust Accusations, and for this Reason you must be exceeding careful not to give any occasion to the assaults of Envy and Malice. You must walk circumspectly as in the Day, as being in the open view of a Malicious and Censorious World. You must consider, That you have to deal with a crooked and perverse Generation, and that your Care and Circumspection must be suited to these Circumstances.

And in the Nature of the thing, He who would Reform his Neighbour, must not be chargeable with the Sin he condemns: He cannot see clearly, that is, with the Honesty and Sincerity of a good Christian, *to take the mote out of his Brothers Eye, who has a beam in his own Eye*: What renders your practise commendable, is the noble principles by which it is Influenced, the Glory of GOD, and your Charity to the Souls of Men; and these must shine out in an exemplary *Conversation*. And if you are truly under the Power of these Principles, you will begin with Reforming your selves. 'Tis the Character of a Hypocrite, to make a show of Religion, when his Heart is far from it; 'tis from such Men that Religion has received the most dangerous Wounds, for when Hypocrisie has been laid open, Wicked Men have taken the occasion to harden themselves, and insult Religion.

Thirdly, I would advise you to beware of that spiritual Pride, into which the Opinion of your being Reformers, and better then other Men, may betray you. The several Circumstances of this Life are exposed to their several temptations: The Devil, our vigilant Adversary, and long practiced in the arts of deceiving, will assault us in that part which is weakest, and lies most exposed, and to such as labour in Reform-

ing others, the Tempter will suggest, that they are the Elect of GOD, that they are gone further into a course of Piety, and are grown up to perfection; and this may fill Mens Hearts with Pride and Vanity.

These swellings of corrupted Nature must be beaten down, by considering that Humility is one of the great Virtues of our Holy Religion, that our Great Apostle St. Paul, tho' he went thro' all the dangers of his Apostleship, and laboured more abundantly than they All, yet humbled himself to the Confession of being one of the greatest of Sinners; and that the Blessed Jesus has Himself determined it, that *there is none good, save GOD only.*

Fourthly, Let me direct you, that your Prosecutions against open Wickedness may appear not to proceed from any private Pique, Hatred, or Relentment against any Mans person; and where there may be a pretence for such exceptions against any of you, let the Prosecution be managed by another hand: Let the World see, they are Mens Vices, that you set your selves against, and that these only are the Objects of your Prosecution. Shew therefore to such, whose Vices you would punish, other real good Offices of Kindness and Friendship, as indeed curing them of their Vices is the greatest, if they had but Hearts to understand it. When they see you act with regard only to the ends now mentioned, the Glory of GOD, and the Salvation of their Souls, this will melt them into an esteem for you; for a generous disinterested Virtue has charms in it, that can scarcely be resisted, and it could not fail of being always valued, if wicked Men did not traduce and misrepresent it.

What then remains, but to beseech Almighty GOD, That He will stay that plague of Sin and Wickedness, which has overspread our Land, and restore that Spirit of Piety and Holiness, which once adorned the Christian Church, that having reformed our Doctrine, purged our Creeds, and recovered our Bibles, He will also with his Grace purifie and cleanse our Hearts. That He will give us Religious Magistrates who will employ their Authority to encourage Piety, and punish Vice; that we may abound in the Love of Him, and of our Neighbour; that He will make us watchful over one anothers Souls, that so we may go on the more cheerfully in our Christian Race, and enjoy Glory, and Immortal Happiness for ever, *Amen.*

